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ABSTRACT

The reports included in this annotated bibliography of 11 publications on school improvement teams suggest that ownership and commitment to improvement are natural consequences of shared planning and decisionmaking, that overcentralization has severely limited the scope of teachers' professional discretion, and that quality circles--stressing active employee participation--can enhance schools. Subsequent reports examine four models of structured teacher participation in school management; explore a site-based improvement program in eight Oaklahoma City schools that began with training the principal, a teacher, and a parent at each school; review a book offering step-by-step assistance for school improvement teams in which teachers play leading roles; and detail how school improvement teams healed the wounds from a teachers' strike in Minnesota. The remaining documents considered include an annotated bibliography on school improvement teams, a report on collaborative and prompt goal setting as the key to improving schools, and a description of a program in Fairfax County (Virginia) designed to increase participation in school management. (KM)

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The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

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School Improvement Teams

1 **Claus, Richard N., and Charmaine J. Girrbach.** "How Evaluators Can Help Foster More Effective Schools." Paper presented at Evaluation 85, the joint meeting of the Canadian Evaluation Society, Evaluation Network, and the Evaluation Research Society, Toronto Ontario, October 1985. 62 pages. ED 263 182.

This paper, its title aside, is concerned primarily with school improvement teams. Its thesis is straight-forward: "Ownership and commitment to improvement are natural consequences of shared planning and decision making." The authors describe the Saginaw Successful Schools Project to illustrate their assertion.

The project began with a meeting to make school staff familiar with and committed to the project. Participants then generated a list of concerns and boiled them down to the five most important ones. Then small groups proposed methods for achieving desired changes and identified facilitating and inhibiting factors.

One school decided to improve instructional effectiveness, communication among teachers, teacher-administrator relations, students' expectations, and basic reading and math skills. A needs assessment specified goals and performance objectives for meeting the goals, such as creating a resource room with well-catalogued materials that would be used by 85 percent of the staff. The objectives listed responsible personnel, deadlines, expected results, evaluation methods, and costs.

Claus and Girrbach provide detailed reference material, including a fourteen-page school survey with instructions for administering, scoring, and presenting it. They also offer guidelines for the group activities.

2 **Futrell, Mary Hatwood.** "Teachers in Reform: The Opportunity for Schools." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 24, 4 (November 1988): 374-80. EJ 381 927.

Futrell argues that past educational leaders assumed that teachers were young, inexperienced, and poorly trained. "The resulting overcentralization," she asserts, has "severely limited the scope of teachers' professional discretion." Futrell believes that today's teachers are well qualified to play a larger role in their schools and that they can do so by participating in school improvement teams.

Improvement teams require several conditions to succeed. First of all, says Futrell, there must be good relations among the school board, administration, and teachers association. A committee of experienced administrators and teachers should be at the project's center. Schools that do not have these ingredients for success should wait until the timing is right before proceeding with participatory decision-making, according to Futrell.

School improvement teams have recorded some impressive successes. Among those cited are evaluation systems for professional development, partnerships with universities to reform school priorities and structures, and the National Education Association's Team Approach to Better Schools program that supports teacher-led reform in more than 100 schools. Futrell cautions groups against being overly ambitious, however. They can maintain momentum and support by minimizing turnover and by setting some goals that can be immediately achieved.

The author concludes that the fruits of school improvement teams can only be had if administrators are "willing to unleash the power of the professional staff."

3 **Greenbaum, Howard H.; Ira T. Kaplan; and William Metlay.** "Evaluation of Problem-Solving Groups: The Case of Quality Circle Programs." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, August 1987. 26 pages. ED 296 383.

This paper offers a "conceptual framework for evaluating and improving the performance of problem-solving groups in organizations," particularly quality circles.

The authors define *quality circles* as groups of three to fifteen people from the same work area. They are trained in group problem-solving and are typically guided by a facilitator. The participants identify and research problems before presenting solutions to management. According to the authors, quality circles frequently founder after their novelty wears off. Effective evaluation can help them to survive.

Many organizations do not evaluate their quality circles, and few evaluations are thorough. Greenbaum, Kaplan, and Metlay examined sixteen evaluations done from 1981 to 1986. They found that most consisted of self-report questionnaires. The majority were primarily concerned with the groups' effect on outputs, particularly changes in task results and in individuals. They tended to ignore groups' problem-solving procedures and particularly their feedback mechanisms.

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The authors recommend supplementing questionnaires with more objective evaluation methods, such as direct observation. They offer a comprehensive evaluation model that breaks the quality circle process into four stages (input, process, output, and feedback) and four levels (task or problem-solving, individual activity, group interaction, and organizational influences). The model, then, is a matrix with sixteen compartments. Under process, for example, the evaluator would consider problem-solving procedures (for task), effort and skill (for individual), interpersonal relations and group cohesion (for group), and interaction with nonquality-circle members (for organization).

The evaluation tool examines how successive stages of group problem-solving affect organizations' varied social components.

4 **Hallinger, Phillip, and Don Richardson.** "Models of Shared Leadership: Evolving Structures and Relationships." *The Urban Review* 20, 4 (Winter 1988): 229-45. EJ 390 063.

This article examines four models of structured teacher participation in school management: Principals' Advisory Councils, Instructional Support Teams, School Improvement Teams, and Lead Teacher Committees. The authors conclude that teachers are best served by programs that grant them formal power and that focus on instructional issues.

Hallinger and Richardson rate the four models by using R. M. Kanter's list of organizational factors that affect role empowerment. In general, teachers' roles are not empowering. Their work tends to be routine, repetitive, unpublicized, and isolated from peers and superiors. Teachers seldom participate in conferences or problem-solving groups.

All four of the teacher-participation models empower teachers, if only by bringing them together. Teachers on Principal's Advisory Councils advise principals on management issues. Members of Instructional Support Teams meet frequently in a collegial environment to coach each other and to deal with instructional issues. School Improvement Teams guide educational programs and are often chaired by administrators. In some areas, such as California, they are mandated from outside the school and may enjoy a lot of authority.

Lead Teacher Committees usually offer teachers the most power. Their purpose, the authors write, is to utilize "the expertise of professional staff" to widen "accountability within the school site beyond the principal." Lead teachers oversee all aspects of instruction. In Rochester, New York, their responsibilities are so heavy that they teach only half time. Some models have the lead teachers elect an instructional director and restrict the principal's role to management decisions.

The authors conclude that School Improvement Teams and Lead Teacher Committees invest teachers with "formally delegated authority" and "significant access to power."

5 **Malanowski, Rose M.; Peter Kachris; and Valerie Kennedy.** "Professional Analysis Teams in Schools: A Case Study." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Francisco, April 1986. 24 pages. ED 280 135.

The quality circles so popular in industry can, the authors assert, enhance schools. They demonstrate how the Professional Analysis Team (PAT) program accomplished that goal in the Auburn (New York) School District.

PAT, like quality circles, stresses active employee participation. Auburn's administration urged teacher participation without making it mandatory, agreed that staff should be paid for two-thirds of the time they spent in the project, and made contract issues off limits. The central office defused middle managers' qualms by making teachers' recommendations subject to administrators' approval and by offering principals their own circle group. All the groups had a broad mandate: to address any problems that affected their work.

Using quality circles in schools entailed several adjustments. Teachers required assistance in breaking education's complex problems down into particular parts and in using concrete language to describe problems. Leaders also urged participants to consult all parties affected by a particular problem. A group considering how to improve the cafeteria environment, for example, invited students to its meetings.

PAT brought results to the Auburn School District. Groups devised a better computer system and ways to minimize removing students from classes for noninstructional activities. The principals, in particular, enjoyed a greater sense of collegiality because of their quality circle. The program had unanticipated benefits, as well. An examination of the paperwork glut at the high school established that teachers generated the vast majority of it for themselves. The authors comment that although faculty "continue to see paper work as a burdensome aspect of their work, they no longer perceive the administration, counselors, and other teachers as the source of the burden."

6 **McBee, Maridyth M., and John S. Fink.** "How One School District Implemented Site-Based School Improvement Planning Teams." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, June 1988. 32 pages. ED 302 888.

According to the authors, Oklahoma City's School Improvement Program "provided a common outlet to direct the energy of all those who had a stake in what happened at their school." It did so by involving many people in planning at the school level.

The site-based improvement program began with training for three members from each school community, usually a principal, teacher, and parent. The participants then returned to their schools and formed planning teams.

McBee and Fink describe how all eight schools developed their programs. One high school's planning team consisted of seven teachers, three other staff members, seven parents, five community members, eight students, and its three facilitators—two teachers and a principal. They met once a month for eight months to discuss concerns before going on a retreat where they specified, prioritized, and wrote objectives for their goals. A seven-member task group, which included five people from the planning team, then prepared a more detailed plan. The staff responded in a generally positive way to the plan and began implementing it nearly two years after the process had begun.

Another school's planning team met resistance from nonparticipating faculty. It resolved the controversy by soliciting the faculty advisory council's suggestions and then amending the plan accordingly. Other common planning team problems included discontinuity in student participation, recruiting business people, maintaining the program when principals changed jobs, and concerns over possible resistance from the central office.

All eight schools reported benefits. Relationships with parents improved, as did staff morale. Some plans brought very substantial gains. One school acquired funding for a health clinic, daycare center, and childbirth classes.

7 **Miller, Rima, and Thomas B. Corcoran.** *Joining Forces: A Team Approach to Secondary School Development.* Trenton: New Jersey Educational Association; and Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, Inc., 1984. 113 pages. ED 278 620.

This clear, detailed book offers step-by-step assistance for school improvement teams. It argues for planned change in which teachers play leading roles.

A faculty-dominated coordinating council is at the center of the *Joining Forces* program. The council's members should be trained in problem-solving, decision-making, data gathering, and communication. They must cooperate with a broad spectrum of staff members, recruit volunteers, and define and implement a detailed plan.

Task groups, on the other hand, are "focused around the accomplishment of very specific goals." These groups should include as many of the faculty as possible so that "decisions are being made by the very same people who are responsible for implementing them."

The council must offer its plan to the appropriate administrative body before implementing it. Miller and Corcoran urge council members to make this presentation a thorough one, to allow administrators sufficient time to consider it, and to be prepared to amend it per their recommendations. Implementation is eased when the entire school community has a sense of ownership in the plan, when the plan reduces work burdens, when it does not threaten staff members' sense of autonomy and authority, and when council members are open to revising it.

Much of the book consists of forms and guidelines. Included are contract agreements for program participants, guidelines for planning and running meetings, a sample council charter, sample meeting agendas, forms for writing goals and evaluations, and a fourteen-page school profile instrument. The authors stress that completing the profile form is particularly important; it provides necessary raw data and, by its very length and detail, builds a sense of teamwork and purpose.

According to Miller and Corcoran, the process of school improvement cannot be separated from its ends. They argue for schools that both expect more out of their staff and students and that are characterized by cooperative, shared decision-making.

8 **Moeser, Elliott L., and Leonard L. Golen.** "Quality of Work Life: A Participative Management Process That Works." *ERS Spectrum* 5, 3 (Summer 1987): 3-7. EJ 359 274.

This case study shows how school improvement teams healed wounds from a teachers' strike in the Duluth (Minnesota) School District.

According to the authors, the district believed that participatory management is "more an attitude and a process than a program." Hence its board policy required management to involve staff "in decisions which affect them," and it set "a high priority on advocating for ideas generated by subordinates."

To implement the new policy, the district set about forming problem-solving teams. The district's top managers and the teacher organization's leadership constituted the steering committee. That committee organized at each building a problem-solving team that consisted of a principal or program supervisor, the building steward, and eight to twelve staff members.

Working by consensus, the teams researched and proposed solutions to problems. They altered procedures in budgeting, scheduling, lunchroom monitoring, and photocopying, to name but four examples.

The problem-solving teams greatly improved relationships between teachers and administrators. Grievances declined immediately and dramatically as open discussion defused potentially divisive issues. The authors conclude that the process of cooperative decision-making has made another strike less likely.

9 **Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.** *Implementing School Improvement Plans: A Directory of Research-Based Tools.* Andover, Massachusetts: Author, February 1987. 72 pages. ED 280 149.

This book largely consists of an annotated bibliography that includes works on school improvement teams, running committee meetings, achieving concensus in decision-making groups, and writing action plans.

Several books discuss effective group activities. Leland P. Bradford's *Making Meetings Work* focuses on group leadership and behavior and on helping group members become more independent. *Learning to Work in Groups*, by Mathew B. Miles, treats how people behave in groups and how to train them for group activities. Rima Miller in *What's a Plan Without a Process?* emphasizes the importance of cooperation in group work. *RUPS: Research Utilizing Problem Solving*, by Charles Jung, Reno Pino, and Ruth Emory, is a training program for teachers participating in problem-solving groups that includes some simulation exercises.

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Several other works also relate to school improvement teams. *Schools and Communities Working Together,* by Juanita Carney and Janet Chrispeels, offers detailed instructions on the topic, including suggestions for funding and budgeting.

Implementing School Improvement Plans has forty-three annotated references. It also has a short chapter on how to put plans into action and a complete set of indices.

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10 **Snyder, Karolyn J.; Richard Krieger; and Robert McCormick.** "School Improvement Goal Setting: A Collaborative Model." *NASSP Bulletin* 67, 465 (October 1983): 60-65. EJ 288 119.

Collaborative and prompt goal setting, the authors say, is the key to improving schools. They describe how Anchorage's East High School used the Delphi Dialog Technique to identify its goals.

The Delphi technique requires several distinct steps. Staff members begin by presenting their ideas in large and small groups and then striving for consensus on "general thrusts for school improvements." A similar process generates recommendations for meeting those goals. Finally, a representative from each team and the school's principal form a council that works with the larger group until consensus is achieved.

East High School used the technique with some 125 teachers administrators, and clerical personnel and completed its task in one day. A single goal emerged: "Develop and implement a program for improving staff and student morale and success." Choosing one goal rather than several made success likely. The authors defend the speed with which the school established its goal by pointing out that alacrity generates and maintains momentum. Participants learned of the school's goal on the day of their meeting, and they immediately set about implementing it.

The authors urge administrators to plan the goal-setting process carefully. The small groups should consist of about nine people and should not harbor departmental cliques with narrow agendas. Administrators should choose a facilitator who is both nonjudgmental and able to keep groups working at their tasks.

The fear that teachers and support staff are unqualified to set schoolwide goals is a natural one. Yet, the authors write, "administrators need to maintain a posture that is positive and confident in the face of the task." They conclude that those who collaborate effectively with their staff will find "the power to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles."

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11 **Thomas, Wayne P., and Albert W. Edgemon.** "Renewing Participatory Management: An Action-Research Program for Secondary Schools." *NASSP Bulletin* 68, 476 (December 1984): 49-56. EJ 311 634.

The authors describe a project in Fairfax County, Virginia, that used the Distributed Management of Instructional Environments (DMIE) program to increase participation in school management.

Each DMIE team consisted of a school's key staff people. According to the authors, the best groups had "principals willing to work cooperatively for the improvement of management in the school and . . . teachers who recognized the high positive correlation of effective management with effective instruction."

The teams did not immediately formulate goals for their schools. They first attended group training sessions on participatory management. The teams then analyzed their schools' management structure to discern who had authority, how managers made decisions, and how the staff communicated. Surveys served both to draw more people into the project and to identify key perceptions and misperceptions of school management. Only then did the groups propose changes in management practices.

The DMIE system stresses respect for school personnel throughout the school improvement process. The staff surveys focus on problematic policies and practices, not unpopular individuals.

The resulting plan should be action oriented and practical. It should describe how needed changes should be made and identify the resources needed to make them.

DMIE brought rapid results to the Fairfax County School District. Two-thirds of the schools quickly utilized teachers more fully in management decisions, and nearly that many reported improved communication between teachers and administrators. Many teachers received substantial training in educational management.

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